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SKETCHING FROM NATURE.

By CHARLES LANMAN.

(Extract from an *Essay on Artistic Recollections*.)

IN sketching from nature it should be the desire of the student to give the spirit of the scene before him, without attempting to rival the photographer in making out details. Whilst it is true that nature is a safe guide under all circumstances, it does not follow that the artist has attained a worthy end simply because he may have painted all that he saw. He should exercise judgment and taste, and exhibit the poetry in his soul by painting only what has an elevating influence—what is beautiful or grand and calculated to inspire the higher sentiments of the mind. There is one point connected with painting from nature, as well as in the studio, which I have never seen mentioned, but which is of considerable importance, *viz.*, a man can never do his best unless in a happy state of mind. If he has just come out of a row with anybody, from any cause, or happens to be nursing a little wrath to keep it warm, he had better throw aside the pencil and go a-fishing. In every hard thought or unkind feeling that we may harbor there is something more subtle than electricity, which interferes with the spirit of beauty, and prevents both the heart and hand from performing their whole duty. But, on the other side, if there is nothing but sunshine in the heart as we sit before the canvas, we seem to have a power which gently leads us on to success, and then it is that we enjoy the pleasures of painting in the most complete and satisfactory degree. The two leading ideas which a student should keep before him are simplicity of design and pureness of color, and I have often been amazed to find a scene looking well when painted which was in itself tame and uninteresting. In painting, as well as in poetry, nature “never did betray the heart that loved her,” and it is not so much what we paint, provided the scene is beautified with light and atmosphere. But when the scene is glorious there is a joy in attempting to reproduce it in a picture which cannot be described, although the consciousness of utterly failing in the attempt is invariably disheartening. As John Eagles has said, the advantage of a true pursuit is that it never ends—and this is thoroughly the case with the sketcher. New fields of beauty open to him at every step he advances; he lays up new acquirements, and all of them come to him with delight. The true purpose of art is to raise emotions; it stops short of this when it only conjures up remembrances. The judicious study is that which seizes from nature those parts which, whether by lines, light shade or color, associate themselves with our feelings, and through them move the imagination.

The remark was once made to me by Daniel Webster that the only kind of reading which was without any alloy was that of books about nature, and the truthfulness of this sentiment, it seems to me, can be felt to the fullest extent only by the landscape painter. As we acquire the habit of peering into the countless mysteries of the beautiful, which flock around us in the pure, open country or on the seashore, it would seem as if we came nearer to the heart of nature than we can by merely performing the part of the

ordinary spectator. The thoughtful husbandman may indeed enjoy his many quiet hours as he devotes himself to his farm duties, but he must fain think of his expenses and the profits of autumn. But not so with the artist, who, although sometimes in danger of going hungry to bed, gathers all he can of unadulterated delight from his intercourse with the skies and the waters and the woods and mountains. And how can you expect a man whose mind has been soiled by an unbounded love of gain, or by contact with fashionable or political life, to enjoy the charms of nature in their perfection! The thing is impossible and by no means mysterious. Between the true artist and the average man of the world there is little or no sympathy. The very attempt to reproduce in a picture what has filled us with delight in the open world is fraught with a kind of gladness which cannot be described, but which we know to be pure and believe to be the parent of a pure life. With the majority of men the idea of spending half an hour in watching the departing sun and the coming on of a lovely twilight is a waste of time which might be better employed in studying the prices current; but with the lover of nature thoughts and feelings may be inspired during that brief time which in some mysterious way will link the present with the hereafter in such a manner as to fill the soul with a real happiness. As Wordsworth has written:

O joy that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature still remembers
What was so fugitive!

Indeed, I have long held the opinion, or cherished the feeling, that the love of nature, as we are permitted to enjoy it in this world, is allied in some degree to the joys of a future life, only that the goodness and power of the Divine Creator and the natural wonders of Heaven are beyond our present comprehension.

But I must stop preaching, and now turn to some of my experiences in visiting out-of-the-way places of special interest to the artist. My first sketches of the Lower Saint Lawrence and the River Saguenay (about which I published a book in 1848) were taken from a French fishing smack, when my companions were Louis L. Noble and our respective wives. We had one fierce battle with a storm, the ladies experienced many discomforts and some suffering from sea-sickness and coarse food, but what we saw was so fresh and grand that all of the party long looked back upon that summer as one of the brightest they had ever known. Whether good or bad, the sketches I took on that occasion, which were exhibited to Regis Gignoux, caused him to visit the wonderful Saguenay, with which, however, he was somewhat disappointed, as the scenery was depressing in its solemn grandeur and loneliness. The pictures he painted of it were few and not among his better productions. Once when ascending the Restigouche in New Brunswick, and I had brought my canoe to a halt for the purpose of sketching the several mouths of the Mattapedia and the farm of Alexander Fraser, how little did I think the time would come when a party of New York anglers would pay thirty

thousand dollars for said farm, where, unmolested, they might enjoy the pleasures of salmon fishing. But I can tell those gentlemen that it was my fortune to capture with the fly a goodly number of the stalwart ancestors of the fish which they have since taken in those waters. And when I sketched the Falls of the St. John, in the same province, many years ago, it would have been impossible for me to believe that my little picture, with others of that region, would eventually be published in the *London News* and afterwards copied, without credit, by a noted American journal.

But a greater honor than that was conferred upon me by another publication of note, whose editor at one time gave me credit for first describing the scenery of North Carolina, and engraved a number of my sketches, but who subsequently appropriated whole pages of my descriptions, while utterly ignoring even my existence.

But perhaps the most curious plagiarism of one of my sketches was that of a log cabin on the Lower Mississippi, published in the *London News*, but which subsequently appeared in a history of Salem, in Massachusetts, entitled "Early Settlement at Head of Bass River." There was a *witchery* about this discovery which puzzled me in the extreme.

For old houses I have always had a fancy, and the most interesting one I ever sketched, on account of its associations, was the birthplace of Daniel Webster. I was driven to the spot, in Franklin, New Hampshire, by the great man himself; the sketch was made at his request, and while he was looking over my shoulders; and, as the house was torn down a few months afterwards, the picture proved to be the only existing memorial of the place, and for that reason has frequently been engraved. Another famous house that I once reproduced in color was the Longfellow homestead, in Newbury, Massachusetts, which I sketched by the special request of the poet, with whom I visited the interesting locality.

Among log-cabin pictures, my five favorites represent the homes of a "Hermit Woman Among the Alleghanies," of a "Hermit Philosopher on the Aroostook, in New Brunswick," "The Hunter of Tallulah," "The Hunter of the Adirondacks" and "The Lone Fisherman of the Thames," all of whom have long since been dead, but whom I shall always remember, as hap-hazard friends, with rare satisfaction. From my large collection of sketches taken on the Lower and Upper Mississippi and on Lake Superior, I once made a selection and published them in the *London News*. One of them represented a prairie scene in Iowa, with an Indian in his canoe in the foreground, and that little picture was subsequently copied in oil on a large canvas by an unknown artist and sold in New York as an *original* production. Another of that series represented a sand-bank at the mouth of the River St. Louis, in Minnesota, upon which now stands the famous city of *Duluth*; and still another was of a solitary log cabin on the Upper Mississippi, where may now be seen the church spires of the city of St. Paul. Of the many localities which I depicted during my various tours in the Southern States, nearly the whole of them have

now been reached by the photographer, and not a few of them have become famous in the history of the late war for the Union. As I think of my pictures of Lookout Mountain and the bluffs of the Upper Tennessee, it seems almost impossible to realize that its waters have been tinged with fraternal blood. And when I recall the unnumbered scenes associated with the forests and swamps and fountains of the Gulf States, I can hardly desire to visit them again for fear of witnessing the ravages of a cruel war. That many changes have taken place at Lake George, among the Adirondacks, on the Great Lakes and the Upper St. Lawrence is of course true; but in those regions the blighting influences have come from the innovations of fashion and *civilization*.

Among the petty personal annoyances which I have experienced in my sketching tours are the following: Once, when seated on a sandy spot at the junction of two streams which emptied into Lake George, I was startled by a spotted snake which passed directly under my legs, and before it had entirely disappeared, a black snake made its appearance on the trail of its supposed enemy, whereupon, as the reader may imagine, my love for the fine arts suddenly collapsed, and there was nothing torpid in my movements as I escaped from the "trail of the serpent." On another occasion, while crossing Lake George for the purpose of sketching Black Mountain, the boat in which I was seated came in contact with a rattlesnake which was traveling in the same direction, but with a purpose entirely unknown, and although his snakeship was duly slaughtered, his presence, under such peculiar circumstances, had the effect, once again, of cooling my artistic ardor. But I also have a bill of damages to file against the race of quadrupeds, for, when once sketching a cluster of great moss-covered trees among the White Mountains, I was interrupted by a young bear, although his actions, when we peered into each others eyes, proved that he was horrified at my appearance or disgusted with the smell of my painting materials. I very distinctly remember that I "found no rest for the soles of my feet" until I had reached the Glen House, about five miles from the scene of my discovery. But more annoying than this bearish adventure, have been those connected with the fraternity of bulls. I have always hated their eccentricities, while admiring the appearance of these splendid animals, and they all seem to be posted in regard to my antipathy. I never meet one on the road without giving him a wide berth, and I cannot mention any four-footed beast which has done so much to bring out my full capacity for running. The last of these fellows who took it upon himself to interfere with my rights as an artist, was one which espied me while sketching some of the magnificent oaks which are the glory of the country near Indian Hill, in Massachusetts—the home of Ben. Perley Poore. The beast in question had been roaming about alone and unhappy, and when from a hill, not far away, he saw me seated near a stone wall, he shook his head, uttered a snort of defiance and at once came booming down upon me in a wrathful mood. Without stopping to fix my materials, I left them on the rock where I had been seated, crossed the

adjoining stone fence, climbed a small tree and paused for further proceedings. The bull came to the rock, took a smell of my unfinished sketch, as if displeased with its tone or drawing, uttered a grunt, peered at me with his great eyes, and marched away, quite as disgusted as I was myself. But country dogs have been fully as annoying to me as bears, rattlesnakes and bulls. From the fact that the most picturesque cabins seem always to harbor ugly dogs, my sketches in that direction have not been as numerous as I could have desired. As a means of protection, when once spending the summer among the Dutch yeomanry near the Catskill Mountains, I purchased a young Newfoundland dog, and took him with me in my wanderings. But the experiment was fruitless; for while the wayside dogs did not so frequently attack me as before, they invariably pounced upon my companion, and as these assaults made me very angry, I abused the owners of the inhospitable dogs, and my sketching life became one of continuous quarrels. Nor can I exonerate some of the insect tribes for their efforts to thwart my æsthetic proclivities. By the mosquitoes and black flies I have been treated with such outrageous rudeness, that I can only remember them with scorn. Had it not been for them, perchance, the forest regions of Canada and New Brunswick, of New England and New York, would have been far better known to the world than they are to-day—in spite of the many charming photographs which have recently been made. Among my sketches is one of the valley of the Thames, in Connecticut, taken from the door way of a deserted house. The day, the scene and the atmosphere were all perfect, and my *seat* most comfortable, but the owners of that building made a savage demonstration against me. The head of the family, and ever so many of his children, treated me so roughly that my eyes were blackened and my hands and face all blistered with poison, until, for fear of losing my life, I was forced to make my escape, followed by the howling of a colony of bumble bees whose home I had disturbed.

But think not, O ye of little faith! who have never enjoyed the pleasures of sketching, that they are in any way counterbalanced by such annoyances as I have mentioned. The supposed or real unkindness of the beasts and reptiles and insects may be forgotten, but not so with those blessed influences of nature which accompany or surround the artist as he wanders alone from one scene of beauty to another. Once, for example, while sketching a sunset scene on the top of the Alleghanies, the surrounding silence was only broken by the whistling of a quail in the distance, and the chirping of a pee-weet only a few paces off; and, because of their association with my childhood, their voices inspired in me an indescribable pleasure. On another occasion, and in the same region, while sketching a beautiful valley surrounded with forest-covered hills, I heard the song of the Whippoorwill and the mellow tones of a cow bell stealing through the glowing atmosphere, and I thought, at the time, that sweeter music had never been heard in any land. From a cliff of South Peak Mountain, among the Catskills, I once attempted to sketch the movements of two thunder storms that were chasing each other along the valley of the Hudson, and while doing so, the apprehensions usually inspired by

the powers of electricity were all dispelled, and I almost felt that it would only be a pleasure even to play with the forked lightning, for the surrounding influences of nature seemed to make me oblivious of everything not connected with the glorious prospect. When my spirits have been almost paralyzed by the everlasting roar of a great city for long weary months, and I have gone forth with my sketching materials, in the summer or autumnal months, to some quiet nook in the country, it has seemed to me that a dozen trips to foreign lands could not be compared with the blessed rest and peace to be found in "our own proud clime."

But the delights of sketching from nature are by no means limited to the inland regions of our country. Along the shores of the Atlantic, from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to that of Mexico, I have journeyed extensively, and the unnumbered charms of our coast scenery seem to have become a part of my very being. The grandeur of the ocean has always seemed to me more impressive near its shores than out sight of land. When I see the dark blue and wild waters dashing against the brown cliffs, and then watch the foam mingling with the sky; or look upon the liquid plain sleeping in the sunlight of noon; or gaze upon the sea, with flocks of ships coming from distant lands before a gentle breeze; or hear its billows, solemn and majestic, rolling upon the sloping shores—I never fail to be impressed with the power of that Being who holds the ocean world in the hollow of His hand. Far be it from me to lisp a syllable against the glory of a giant oak as it commands the circle of an inland valley, but in the movements, the colors and the moaning of a great billow, when about to perish on the shore, there is something bordering the sublime. And in sketching the scenery of the ocean, I am always impressed with the wonderful variety of its phases and moods. By way of experiment, I have sometimes taken several sketches from one particular spot in a single day, and have been amazed to see how very different they were in character, the colors never remaining the same for a single hour. Nor is the element of solitude on the sea shore less impressive than it is in the forest or on the great prairies of the west. To visit the ocean in the company of ten thousand fellow sinners—whether at Coney Island or Long Branch, or at *Philadel' hia by the sea*, commonly called Atlantic City—is simply an abomination. To enjoy it in perfection, one should be alone (but not as a dead waif upon a foreign strand), although one particular companion may not be out of place—for have we not all been fascinated by the two figures which Berket Foster has a habit of putting into his lovely little pictures of the sea shore?

THE *SIÈCLE* relates under the title of *A Sequestration*, the following little history:

A well-known artist, (whose name we do not divulge) lost some time ago in a *cercle* the sum of 150,000 francs; not being able to discharge this "debt of honor" he placed himself at the disposition of the director of the club. Since then our artist, confined at the residence of the director, has produced a multitude of sketches, which not meeting with sales, his liberation is difficult, as he has given his parole not to leave his quarters before the complete liquidation of his debt.